



**Uncertain if a water body may be subject to these rules?**

**Please contact N.C. Division of Water Quality staff for an on-site determination.**

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- Washington Regional Office  
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**North Carolina's Riparian Buffer Protection Rules**

Neuse River Basin  
Tar-Pamlico River Basin



**Know the basics of riparian buffer rules in the Neuse and Tar-Pamlico river basins.**

**What is a riparian buffer?**

A riparian buffer is a strip of forested or vegetated land bordering a body of water.

The vegetation and root systems in a riparian buffer stabilize the stream-bank, preventing soil from eroding into the water.

Riparian buffers also act as a filter to remove pollutants.

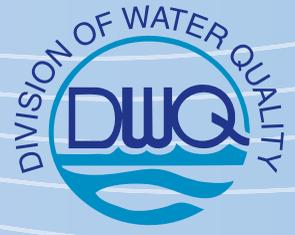
Preserving riparian buffers is critical to protecting our water resources.



**Riparian buffers have many benefits:**

- Filtering stormwater runoff.
- Providing flood control.
- Stabilizing streambanks.
- Protecting property.
- Adding scenic value to communities.
- Absorbing excess nutrients.
- Preventing erosion.
- Providing fish and wildlife habitat.
- Moderating water temperature.

Riparian Buffer Rules and Applications are available online: <http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/wq/swp/ws/401/riparianbuffers>.



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## Where do the riparian buffer rules apply?

The riparian buffer rules apply to the following types of water bodies that are shown on the **most recent published version of the soil survey maps** prepared by the Natural Resources Conservation Service or the **most recent 1:24,000 scale quad-range topographic maps** prepared by the U.S. Geologic Survey:

- Perennial streams
- Intermittent stream
- Modified natural streams
- Lakes and reservoirs
- Ponds (including beaver ponds)
- Estuaries and rivers

## How are riparian buffers measured?

For streams, the riparian buffer is measured landward from the top of the stream bank on each side of the stream.

For ponds, lakes and reservoirs, the riparian buffer is measured from the normal water level.

In the 20 coastal counties, the riparian buffer is measured from the landward edge of the N.C. Division of Coastal Management's wetland boundary.

## What is allowed in riparian buffers?

The riparian buffer must remain undisturbed, regardless of property size or type of land use, unless the use is listed in the rules as exempt, potentially allowable or potentially allowable with mitigation.

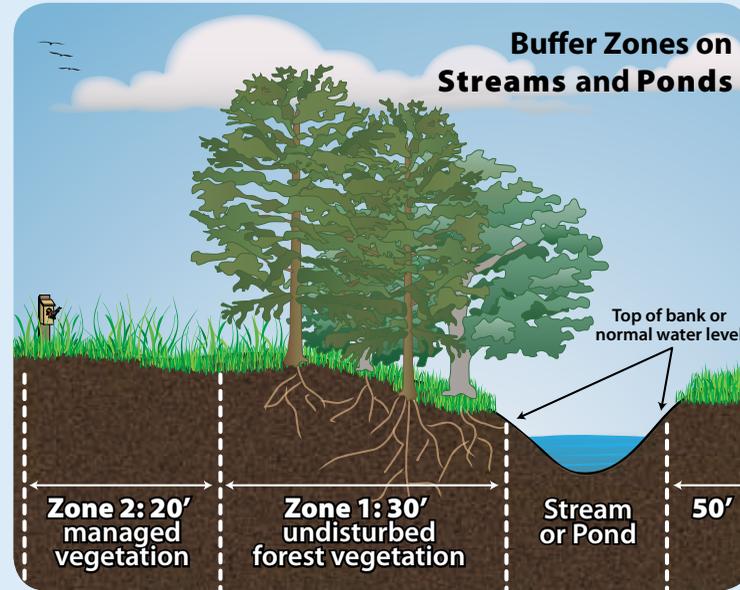
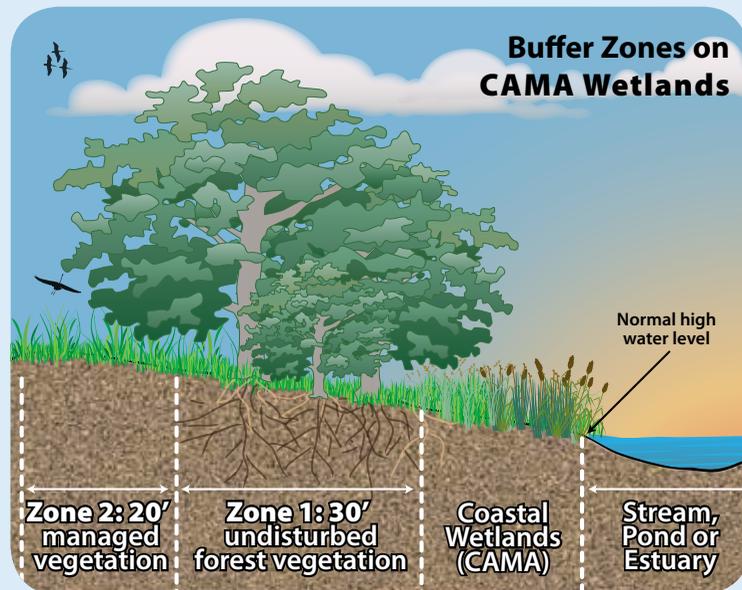
**Refer to the Table of Uses in the rules for specific activities.**

- **Exempt** uses are allowed in the riparian buffer without approval from the N.C. Division of Water Quality (DWQ) or delegated local authority.
- **Potentially Allowable** uses may occur in the buffer only after written authorization from DWQ or delegated local authority.
- **Potentially Allowable with Mitigation** uses may occur in the buffer only after written authorization from DWQ or delegated local authority that includes a mitigation strategy.
- **Prohibited** uses are not allowed in the buffer unless a variance is granted from the N.C. Environmental Management Commission.
- Activities not listed are **prohibited**.

## How wide are the riparian buffers?

The rules require a 50-foot riparian buffer that is divided into two zones.

The 30 feet closest to the water (Zone 1) must remain undisturbed. The outer 20 feet (Zone 2) can be managed vegetation.



The benefits of riparian buffers are maximized when there is diffuse flow of stormwater runoff.

## What is diffuse flow?

Diffuse flow refers to overland water flow that is spread out over the landscape, not concentrated into a defined channel.

## When is diffuse flow required?

Diffuse flow is required on all buffered streams, regardless of property size or type of land use. It must be achieved before stormwater runoff enters the riparian buffer from any new ditch or manmade conveyance.

## How can you achieve diffuse flow?

Diffuse flow may be achieved by installing a level spreader or other diffuse flow device. Level spreaders and other devices must be designed according to the N.C. Stormwater BMP Manual (<http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/wq/ws/su/bmp-manual>).